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Abraham Lincoln and Foreign Countries

China

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China Finds a Hero in Lincoln?

April 1999

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Last week Americans bid farewell to the prime minister of China, Zhu Rongji, who was visiting the U.S. to bolster the "strategic partnership" between the two nations. His departure couldn't have come too soon, what with his crack about Lincoln being "a model" for Taiwan's reunification with China. Comparing the forced return of Taiwan to China with Lincoln's enforcement of the Constitution in the "seceding" states during the Civil War is ludicrous.

About a month before the Civil War began, Lincoln delivered his first inaugural address. He outlined his hopes for avoiding war with southern states intent on leaving the Union because of his election. Lincoln was careful not to assert full federal authority in the South to avoid further provocation of hostility. But he also explained why he thought "secession" was actually rebellion, and therefore inconsistent with both the American union and self-government proper.

"Plainly, the central idea of secession," Lincoln declared, "is the essence of anarchy." He explained that "the only true sovereign of a free people" is a majority of the citizenry acting through a constitutional system with "checks and limitations" on their power. No blind devotee of pure democracy, Lincoln thought that a constitutional majority would best reflect the will of the people through "deliberate changes of popular opinions." The only alternatives were anarchy or despotism.

So when Premier Rongji spotted Lincoln's portrait during his U.S. visit, and remarked, "I think the Abraham Lincoln president is a model" of how China can reunify with Taiwan, one wonders where the analogy holds. Rongji wanted Americans to interpret Lincoln's use of force to keep the southern states in the Union as a justification for China's refusal to renounce force to return Taiwan to "the motherland." But the despotism that marks communist China's rule could not be further removed from the constitutionalism that marked Lincoln's presidency.

The national elections of 1860 took place under a long-established Constitution of the United States. Despite being left off the ballots of ten southern states, Lincoln was elected president. He assured dubious southerners that neither he nor his party intended to deny the constitutional rights of any citizen—including slaveowners. Five weeks after Lincoln's inauguration as president, South Carolina fired on a federal fort, thereby starting the Civil War.

Lincoln then exercised his sworn duty as president to "preserve, protect and defend" the Constitution by doing just that. When asked when the war would end, he always replied, "as soon as the rebels stop shooting." For Lincoln to renounce force to keep the states united would be to renege on his presidential oath and give license to America's enemies, whether foreign or domestic.

Turn now to the alleged parallel to the civil war between the Communists of mainland China and the Nationalists of Taiwan. Talk about a "cold war." For the most part, the struggle for a united government of present-day China and Taiwan has been on ice since the Nationalists' retreat to Taiwan and Mao Tse-tung's founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Even granting the argument that secession from the United States was justified according to states' rights, Taiwan never seceded from communist China. Instead the Nationalists claimed they were the legitimate rulers of Taiwan and mainland China.

More importantly, Maoist China was only a republic in name. The Communist Party has ruled on behalf of the mainland Chinese people but with no accountability or concern for rights. Premier Rongji implied as much when he contrasted the "freedom-loving people" of America with the "peace-loving people" of China. For China, a peace bought at the price of freedom, what Lincoln called "despotism," remains the only game in Beijing.

From Chairman Mao to Premier Rongji, might has always spelled right—especially for the Communists who have controlled China for the past half century. From the American founders, Lincoln drew the opposite lesson: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." His Civil War presidency demonstrates that might on behalf of right is the only legitimate exercise of government authority.

Lincoln's presidency *is* a model for communist China, but not in the way Rongji imagines. The premier thinks China must choose between peace or disorder, but Lincoln elevated freedom above both. Of course, governing a free society is no easy project. As Lincoln observed, "Must a government, of necessity, be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?"

Accepting the difficulty, Lincoln thought his duty was to give freedom and self-government a fighting chance. If only Premier Rongji valued the same in the Chinese people, he would see that Lincoln could teach him how to help the Chinese "achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace."

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Lincoln was there when the Qing Dynasty collapsed

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Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), while exploring ways to salvage their nation, many Chinese drew inspiration from the experiences of the United States.

Doctor Sun Yat-sen, the pioneer of China's modern democratic revolution, said on many occasions he wished to follow the political example set by the United States. His famed "Three Principles of the People" — Nationalism, Democracy and the People's Livelihood — were, to a large extent, based upon Lincoln's ideal of "government of the people, by the people and for the people."

Mao Zedong, a founder of the Chinese Communist Party, was also deeply impressed by the deeds of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. After reading their stories in the book "Biographies of the World's Greatest People" as a young man, he was convinced that "China also needs such figures."

Ever since they came to know about George Washington, the Chinese people have had a great respect for him as the forefather and personification of the United States, regardless of the vicissitudes of the Sino-US relationship. The other American enjoying a similar status in China is Abraham Lincoln.

During World War II, China was a major battleground where most of the Japanese army was engaged in a hard-fought war with the Chinese people whose unrelenting efforts at repelling the invasion and their unyielding spirit won the generous support of the American government and people led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

When the Japanese army cut the supply line between China and Myanmar in 1942, the US Air Force opened an air route across the "Hump" of the Himalayas which greatly assisted China's war against Japan. Many planes were lost due to the harsh weather conditions over the mountains and up to 1,500 American pilots sacrificed their lives supporting China's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

Only a few years ago, Chinese search parties found the remains of American planes lost in World War II in Guangxi and Tibet autonomous regions.

Fighting shoulder-to-shoulder in the anti-fascist war, the Chinese and American peoples forged a strong and close friendship which is still cherished with fond memories today. In Nanjing, the graves of American pilots have been carefully preserved.

Right now, China is undertaking the mammoth task of developing its huge western region and this naturally reminds the Chinese people of America's similar experience almost two centuries ago. It is widely known that the construction of railways was one of the major reasons for America's economic take-off.

Ultimate unification

In the cold winters of the 1840s, when other construction teams had retreated from the harsh conditions in the Rocky Mountains, Chinese workers forged ahead, extending the railways into the wild and vast American west and many died as a result.

In 1991, in recognition of their contribution, the State of Illinois erected a monument in Shanghai made up of 3,000 rail spikes. On the monument is inscribed the following message: "Chinese railway builders were instrumental in bridging the western and eastern coastlines and the ultimate unification of the US."

I believe that Chinese who see this monument will leave with the impression that the Americans are not ungrateful.

However, the popularity proved to be only fleeting because soon jeeps driven by American soldiers and carrying Chinese women were seen rampaging around Chinese streets.

In a short time, Chinese amity towards the United States turned into animosity after an American soldier raped a student from Peking University in a square in central Beijing on Christmas night 1946.

Ultimately, the United States "lost" China when it openly sided with the corrupt Chiang Kai-shek regime before and during China's civil war.

History is seldom free of setbacks. Due to cultural and ideological differences and conflicting strategic interests, the United States and China saw their relationship change drastically from being allies in World War II to being enemies afterwards. In the early 1950s, the two countries even fought a bloody war on the Korean peninsula.

Decades have passed since then but I do not think either side will easily change their views about that war. However, not long ago, I was told that an American company was working with China's Central Television Station on a movie called, "38th Parallel," a saga about the Korean War.

Who, 50 years ago, could have imagined that the former enemies would join forces to make an artistic work commemorating the war?

Ever after the Korean War, the two sides entered two decades of confrontation, highlighted in China by the slogan, "Down with American Imperialism" and in the US by a seal in American passports which read: "Invalid for entry into China."

The prolonged confrontation and isolation had made it hard for each side to acquire accurate information about the other, so much so that before US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's first secret trip to China in 1971, President Richard Nixon and Kissinger were genuinely worried whether they needed to observe China's ancient imperial ritual of kneeling and kowtowing when greeting top officials in China.

(The author is vice chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Foreign Affairs Committee. This is the second part of a series of articles under the title of "America and Americans Through Chinese Eyes," published by China Intercontinental Press. Part 3 will appear tomorrow.)

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China's Lincolnophilia

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By Alan Wachman

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), Abraham Lincoln's stance on national unity during the U.S. Civil War and his opposition to the institution of slavery have been summoned up by PRC officials, media, and elites in efforts to explain and legitimate their own response to those they disparage as "separatists" in Taiwan and Tibet.

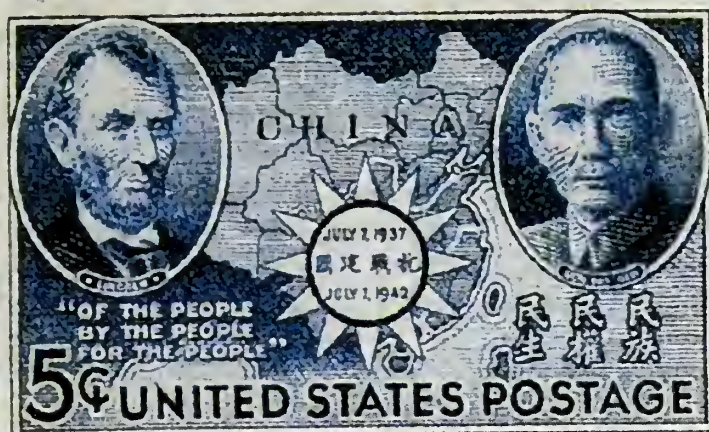
To Beijing, vigorously opposing separatism and preserving Chinese territorial integrity is a cause no less noble than was Abraham Lincoln's resort to war as a way of preventing the secession of southern states. In its quest for moral authority, Beijing has recalled the rhetoric and posture of Abraham Lincoln toward the Confederacy, apparently unaware that it has misconstrued Lincoln's sentiments by citing his words out of context, drawing erroneous lessons from the example of the U.S. Civil War.

The resort to Lincoln is not new. Prominent Chinese leaders have manifested a touch of Lincolnophilia since the start of the twentieth century. Sun Yat-sen, the Abrahamic forebear of both the Nationalist Party (KMT) of Chiang Kai-shek that was long the ruling party of the ROC and the Communist Party (CCP) of Mao Zedong that established the PRC, explicitly called up Lincoln as a model for his own nationalist creed—*The Three Principles of the People*. According to Lyon Sharman's volume, *Sun Yat-sen: His Life and Its Meaning, a Critical Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1934), Sun reportedly wrote that his own three principles "correspond with the principles stated by President Lincoln—'government of the people, by the people, for the people.' I translated them into ... the people (are) to have ... the people (are) to govern and ... the people (are) to enjoy."

Sun's admiring effort to emulate the bold simplicity and cadence of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address became embedded in the hagiographic record of Sun's contributions to China's revolution, even though the *Three Principles of the People* only vaguely reflect the ideals Lincoln championed. The apparent link between Sun and Lincoln was enshrined in the first article of the 1947 Constitution of the Republic of China (ROC)—a document that remains in effect on Taiwan. It reads, "The Republic of China, founded on the Three Principles of the People, shall be a democratic republic of the people, to be governed by the people and for the people."

Indeed, so established was the putative link between Sun and Lincoln that in 1942 the United States commemorated the fifth anniversary of Japan's invasion of China by issuing a postage stamp featuring the images of both Abraham Lincoln and Sun Yat-sen. The stamp is inscribed with the passage from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address that inspired Sun, as well as the resulting *Three Principles*—in Chinese—that Sun devised. In 1959, the government of the Republic of China (ROC) produced its own commemorative stamp displaying the two "leaders of democracy."

Issued July 7, 1942, in Denver, Colorado, where Sun Yat-sen had been on October 11, 1911, when he learned of the revolution in China.



Lincoln 1



Lincoln 2

Chinese communists also associated themselves with Lincoln, among other American political icons. Michael Hunt, in his *The Genesis of Chinese Communist Foreign Policy* (Columbia University Press, 1996) cites a July 4, 1944 article published in the *Jiefang Ribao* [Liberation Daily], the official press organ of the party. It proclaims that "The work which we Communists are carrying on today is the very same work which was carried on earlier in America by Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln."

In addition, Mao Zedong reportedly told a Reuters correspondent in 1945, "a free, democratic China would. . . realize the 'of the people, by the people, and for the people' concept of Abraham Lincoln and the 'four freedoms' proposed by Franklin Roosevelt."

While references to Lincoln—and particularly to the standard of government that he articulated at Gettysburg—may thread through the political rhetoric of modern China, the effort by leaders of the

PRC to invoke Abraham Lincoln's image and words in support of policy preferences seems to have flourished in recent years. Rather than to use Lincoln's apparent populism as a way of validating and enhancing the prestige of the party's political program for just governance within China, PRC leaders refer to Lincoln's posture during the American Civil War to immunize themselves from criticism about their own unyielding insistence that Taiwan not be allowed to remain separate and Tibet not be allowed to separate from China.

To be sure, the interest in Lincoln waxes and wanes in the PRC. Former president Jiang Zemin, who attended an American missionary school near Shanghai, apparently takes pride in his capacity to recite the Gettysburg Address from memory, in English. He frequently cited Lincoln to reinforce his view that Beijing has an obligation to defend the unity of China—as he understands it—by force, if necessary, against any efforts to divide it. So enamored of Lincoln was Jiang that when *Fortune Magazine* hosted a glitzy confab in Shanghai in 1999, Gerald Levin, then president of AOL Time Warner, publicly presented the Chinese president with a bust of the sixteenth American president.

Former premier Zhu Rongji drew his arrow from the same quiver. Standing beside President Clinton in 1999, Zhu said "Abraham Lincoln, in order to maintain the unity of the United States and oppose independence of the southern part...resorted to the use of force and fought a war. ... So I think Abraham Lincoln...is a model."

Some years later, PRC premier Wen Jiabao told *The Washington Post* on the eve of his departure for the United States in November, 2003, "The Chinese people will pay any price to safeguard the unity of the motherland. I assume that you are familiar with the words of President Lincoln, who once said, 'a house divided against itself will not stand.' While Lincoln did, indeed, speak these words, the passage actually originated with the Bible, Matthew 12:25, as was Lincoln's wont. Lincoln used the phrase often, but it is most closely associated with a speech he gave in Springfield, Illinois, on June 16, 1858, after receiving the Republican nomination for Senator. Lincoln then invoked the passage repeatedly during his debates with Stephen Douglas, in the late summer and fall of that year. He also said "the Union (composed of States) is perpetual."

One wonders what Premier Wen makes of Lincoln's remarks elsewhere in the speech he cited—Lincoln's inaugural address of 1861. First, Lincoln describes the Union as emerging from a voluntary compact.

we find the proposition that, in legal contemplation, the Union is perpetual, confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed in fact, by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured and expressly declared and pledged, to be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution, was "to form a more perfect union."

While they oppose Beijing's expectation of unity, neither the people of Taiwan nor those of Tibet seek to withdraw from any compact they ever made. Yet, Beijing advances the view that it is justified in using force to preserve a single Chinese state of which Taiwan and Tibet are a part. Xu Shiquan, formerly the Director of the Institute of Taiwan Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and then the vice president of the All-China Taiwan Studies Society, cited Lincoln's brief second inaugural address to highlight this point.

Xu is widely quoted in the PRC press referring to Lincoln as having said, "Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came." Xu presumably wishes to associate the PRC with Lincoln and the Union, resigned to fight only to ensure that the nation does not perish. However, the crux of Lincoln's address was not a claim that the Union alone was righteous in its willingness to fight for the preservation of the Union and the Confederacy unjust for making war. Lincoln's doleful address pivots on the citation of another Biblical verse—Matthew 18:7—which states, "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"

The verse originates in an account of Jesus warning of the ill consequences that will befall anyone who would "offend" those who believe in him. Lincoln employs the passage to under-gird a statement of humility in the face of a war that he depicts as divine retribution to both North and South for having tolerated slavery on American soil. Lincoln states:

If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and

South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him?

This was no boastful claim to moral superiority over a wanton and reckless adversary who had driven him to do what he preferred not to do. It was the resignation of a man who had witnessed the ravage of war and acquiesced in an understanding that the North was in some measure as culpable as the South and was being held to account by a just god whose punishment was the war itself.

PRC statesmen who cite Lincoln seem to imply that American citizens should appreciate the plight of the PRC and identify with it as analogous to that of the Union during the Civil War. They implore their audience to see them as responding no differently to the issue of China's unity than did President Lincoln when he confronted the secession of southern states. Unfortunately, a shallow understanding of both American politics leading to the Civil War and of the opening chapter of that war make the recitation of Lincoln's pledge to unity little more than a cheap parlor trick.

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This essay is adapted from "Did Abraham Lincoln Oppose Taiwan's Secession from China?" that will appear as a chapter in *Secession as an International Phenomenon*, to be published in Fall 2010. It is used by permission of the University of Georgia Press. For more information visit www.ugapress.org

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